



New Screening Approach FIT to Fight Colorectal Cancer in the U.S. Kaiser Permanente Southern California Increases Colorectal Cancer Screening Rate by Almost 50 Percent, Significantly Reduces New Cases and Advanced Stage Cancer

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CORTLANDT MANOR, N.Y., Nov. 11, 2010 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- Colorectal cancer (CRC) are two words that most people don't want to talk or even think about. But for 50,000 Americans every year, the disease takes their life.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related death; a figure that may dramatically decrease if Americans are regularly screened for this treatable disease. Colorectal cancer, if detected early, is one of the most curable cancers.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that people ages 50 to 75 receive an annual fecal occult blood test (FOBT), either the Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) or guaiac type, that checks for hidden blood in the stool. This age group should also undergo a sigmoidoscopy procedure every five years, and colonoscopy every 10 years to check for signs of colorectal cancer.

An aggressive preventive screening program, like the one at Kaiser Permanente, uses the Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) for convenient and accurate annual screening. FIT is a take-home test used for detecting gastrointestinal bleeding associated with disorders such as colorectal cancer, polyps and colitis.

Screening rates for colorectal cancer lag far behind screening for other diseases, like cervical and breast cancer. Kaiser Permanente has already seen a 28 percent increase in the diagnosis of early, curable colon cancers.

"At Kaiser Permanente, we believe that if there is more focus on prevention and education, rather than on illness, this country could eliminate or greatly decrease diseases such as cancer of the colon and rectum," said Dr. Jeffrey Weisz, Oncologist and Executive Medical Director for Kaiser Permanente Southern California. "We are proving this theory and putting it into practice with simple screening tests." Weisz says screening is the most realistic approach to reducing new cases by finding non-cancerous colorectal polyps and removing them before they become cancerous. Prior to 2006, Kaiser Permanente used several different screening methods, including colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy and guaiac test kits, and was finding less than 50 percent participation from their eligible patients.

Dr. Weisz believes many patients are hesitant to follow these testing methods because they can be invasive, uncomfortable and time-consuming. The guaiac test, a traditional FOBT, can also be considered inconvenient by patients. It is non-invasive and can be completed at home, but it requires multiple samples, as well as some medicinal and dietary restrictions. For these reasons, many patients did not voluntarily return the completed test kit.

In an effort to increase patient participation and the diagnosis of early colon cancers, Kaiser Permanente switched their annual screening test from the traditional guaiac kit to the FIT method in 2006. The OC FIT-CHEK(R) test, manufactured by Polymedco, is a quick and easy screening method that allows patients to perform the test at home, requiring only one sample collection and no changes to diet or medication.

Kaiser Permanente mailed the FIT at-home kits to thousands of their eligible members between the ages of 50 and 80, and followed up with automated phone call reminders. "When I received this kit from my doctor, I would never have guessed that it would save my life," said Dale Gordon from Rialto, Calif.

"Colorectal cancer screening can be very personal, but being able to take this simple test at home made me get rid of any excuses to get screened. I am so grateful that I took that step. Thank you to the physicians at Kaiser Permanente who treated me for stage 2 colorectal cancer. Had I kept giving excuses, I might be living with stage 4 cancer and not even know it." Since 2006, Kaiser Permanente has screened more than 640,000 members with the new kits and saw compliance increase to 73 percent in 2009, a full 10 percent higher than the national average. With early detection, Kaiser Permanente has seen stage 4 colorectal cancers decrease by 30 percent.

"Preventative care is critical to the future of our country's health - physically and economically," said Dr. Weisz, who understands the benefits of avoiding unnecessary invasive procedures or costly treatments. Last year, Kaiser Permanente spent \$150 million on chemotherapy alone for advance cancer treatment. With early diagnosis, there is a strong likelihood that patients will not have to undergo chemotherapy, radiation or surgery. This is a better use of our patients' health care dollars.

"For families faced with cancer, we want to offer them a good prognosis and a cost effective treatment plan. The key is annual screening to detect colorectal cancer at an early stage when it is treatable and beatable." For more information on FIT screening and how you can get FIT to fight colorectal cancer, please visit www.fittofightcancer.com.

About Dr. Jeffrey Weisz Dr. Jeffrey Weisz is an Oncologist and the Executive Medical Director for Kaiser Permanente Southern California. He has made prevention and the early detection of colorectal cancer a major focus of Kaiser Permanente's integrated system. In 2004, Dr. Weisz began his role as the Executive Medical Director for one of the largest self-governed medical groups in the U.S., the Southern California Permanente Medical Group (SCPMG). As Executive Medical Director, he bears the ultimate responsibility for medical care provided to more than 3 million patients.

Under his leadership, SCPMG has increased its breast cancer and colon cancer screening rates exponentially, and decreased high blood pressure, cholesterol, and congestive heart failure among its members. His goal for SCPMG is for it to become the #1 medical group in the country by providing quality, accessible, personal, and affordable health care.

About Kaiser Permanente Founded in 1945, Kaiser Permanente is one of the nation's largest not-for-profit health plan, serving more than 8.6 million members, with headquarters in Oakland, California. The organization is composed of 35 hospitals, 454 medical offices and over 15,000 physicians. Kaiser Permanente was recently recognized by the National Committee for Quality Assurance as one of the nation's top private health plans, based on consumer experience, prevention, and treatment.

Kaiser Permanente's creation resulted from the challenge of providing Americans medical care during the Great Depression and World War II, when most people could not afford to go to a doctor. Some of the innovations Kaiser Permanente has brought to U.S. health care include prepaid health plans, physician group practices and a focus on preventative care. To learn more about Kaiser Permanente, please visit www.kaiserpermanente.org.

About Polymedco, Inc.

Polymedco, Inc. is a leading manufacturer, marketer, and distributor in the clinical laboratory marketplace. Polymedco supplies clinical diagnostic test kits and

devices that are specialized in chemistry, hematology and cancer. As a world leader in non-invasive colorectal cancer screening technology, they provide the new standard of care with their OC FIT-CHEK(TM) product line.

Since 1980, Polymedco has evolved into a highly skilled and successful marketing, sales, and manufacturing organization, attributing their growth to innovations that make a difference in the lives of their customers, family, and friends. They are personally committed to increasing awareness for colorectal cancer screening. As a partner to their local American Cancer Society chapter, Polymedco has set up a free colorectal cancer screening program for an underserved population, advocating a change in their community to take part in the fight against colorectal cancer. For more information, please visit www.polymedco.com.

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